

NEW YORK TIMES

1 September 1961

U.S. Forewarned of Soviet Plan By Alert Monitor in Middle East

Intercepted Broadcast of Tass Report Enabled Kennedy to Weigh Strategy Before Moscow Announcement

Special to The New York Times.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31—An alert United States monitor at a remote Middle Eastern listening post fished a significant paragraph out of reams of insignificant Soviet news reports yesterday. That paragraph gave Washington its first warning that Moscow had decided to resume tests of nuclear weapons.

The anonymous hero is likely to get a message of congratulations soon from Secretary of State Dean Rusk or even from President Kennedy. Washington, forewarned, was prepared when a Moscow announcement confirmed the news.

The usually efficient Soviet propaganda machine seems to have slipped gears at least three times yesterday afternoon.

Officials here were alerted by the Middle Eastern monitor's report, another intercepted warning of an important Soviet announcement at 7 P. M., Eastern daylight time, and a premature "correction" for a Soviet press agency dispatch that had not yet been distributed.

U. S. Planned Strategy

Thus, by the time the 7 o'clock announcement came, President Kennedy, Secretary Rusk and their top aides had already weighed the Soviet move at a white house conference. They had planned their counter-strategy and were ready with a reaction statement by 10 P. M.

The intercepted paragraph revealed the Soviet Government's decision and editorial comment approving it. It was part of a long report on Soviet foreign policy sent out by Tass, the official Soviet press agency, to semi-weekly district and village newspapers in Central Asia. It was broadcast from Moscow at 1:15 P. M. and was to be held for release until 7 P. M., Washington time.

Apparently it was part of the regular file of news and opinion supplied by Tass by radio at dictation speed to newspapers that do not have teletype lines.

Paragraph Delayed

There was a three-hour delay before the paragraph was relayed to Washington, presumably because the Soviet broadcast first had to be transcribed from tapes and translated for officials capable of evaluating it. The message reached the State Department during the President's news conference in the same building, but he was not interrupted.

Washington had already been alerted at 3:30 P. M. by the intercepted Tass report indicating that there would be an important announcement that evening. The pieces began to fit together when, after receipt of the Middle Eastern report, a British newsmen inquired about another Tass transmission.

His London office, the newsmen said, received a "correction" from Tass for a story it had not yet received. Apparently it indicated some kind of decision about nuclear testing, he said, inquiring whether the department knew what was happening.

The department did not know, but by then it could guess.

At 5:25 P. M. Secretary Rusk and Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, went to the White House to alert the President. They decided not to let Moscow cap-ture headlines with its version of events and planned a state-ment condemning the Soviet de-cision.

The young man in the Middle East, whose name was withheld, was hailed in State Department corridors today as an official who had more than com-pensated for the cost and tedium of keeping a watch on what Soviet semi-weeklies in central Asia may have to say tomorrow.